

CV 12 3144

SUMMONS ISSUED

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

FILED
IN CLERK'S OFFICE
U.S. DISTRICT COURT E.D.N.Y.

MARY LISA MAONE on behalf of herself and
all other similarly situated consumers

★ JUN 22 2012 ★

Plaintiff,

LONG ISLAND OFFICE

-against-

ALLEN M. ROSENTHAL

Defendant.

HURLEY, J
BOYLE, M

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT

Introduction

1. Plaintiff Mary Lisa Maone seeks redress for the illegal practices of Allen M. Rosenthal in which he unlawfully engaged in the collection of consumer debts in violation of the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act, 15 U.S.C. § 1692, *et seq.* ("FDCPA").
2. Plaintiff is a citizen of the State of New York who resides within this District.
3. Plaintiff is a consumer as that term is defined by Section 1692(a)(3) of the FDCPA.
4. The alleged debt that Defendant sought to collect from the Plaintiff involves a consumer debt.
5. Upon information and belief, Defendant's principal place of business is located within Hicksville, New York.
6. Defendant is regularly engaged, for profit, in the collection of debts allegedly owed by consumers.

7. Defendant is a "debt collector" as that term is defined by the FDCPA, 15 U.S.C. § 1692(a)(6).

Jurisdiction and Venue

8. This Court has federal question jurisdiction under 15 U.S.C. § 1692k(d) and 28 U.S.C. § 1331.
9. Venue is proper in this district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b), as the acts and transactions that give rise to this action occurred, in substantial part, within this district.

Allegations Particular to Mary Lisa Maone

10. Upon information and belief, on a date better known by Defendant, Defendant began to attempt to collect an alleged consumer debt from the Plaintiff.
11. Within the one year immediately preceding this action, the Defendant left many messages on the Plaintiff's answering machine on numerous occasions.
12. On or about March 15, 2012, Defendant sent a collection letter communicating to the least sophisticated consumer that the communication came from a law firm in a practical sense violating Section 1692e(3).
13. The FDCPA prohibits the use of any "false, deceptive, or misleading representation or means in connection with the collection of any debt." 15 U.S.C. § 1692e. It enumerates a non-exhaustive list of sixteen debt-collection practices that run afoul of this proscription, including "the false representation or implication that [a] communication is from an attorney." *Id.* § 1692e(3).

The Second circuit has held that a debt-collection letter from a law firm or lawyer violates Section 1692e(3) if an attorney was not "directly and personally involved" with

the debtor's account — such as by reviewing the debtor's file — before the letter was sent. Clomon v. Jackson, 988 F.2d 1314, 1320-21 (2d Cir. 1993) See, e.g., Taylor v. Perrin, Landry, deLaunay & Durand, 103 F.3d 1232, 1237-38 (5th Cir. 1997); Avila v. Rubin, 84 F.3d 222, 229 (7th Cir. 1996); Martsof v. JBC Legal Grp., P.C., No. 1:04-CV-1346, 2008 WL 275719, at *7 (M.D. Pa. Jan. 30, 2008); Sonmore v. Checkrite Recovery Servs., Inc., 187 F. Supp. 2d 1128, 1133 (D. Minn. 2001) (Alsop, J.); See Also. Suquilanda v. Cohen & Slamowitz LLP, No. 1:10-cv-05868 (S.D.N.Y. SEP 08, 2011) ("Absent any disclaimer and without an attorney conducting any meaningful review ,Using a "Law Office" Letterhead States a Claim for Relief under Section 1692e(3)"

14. The Second Circuit confronted similar facts in Clomon. There, the attorney Defendant approved the form of dunning letters sent by a collection agency and also "approved the procedures according to which th[e] letters were sent."988 F.2d at 1317. He did not have any specific involvement with each debtor's account, however, such as reviewing the debtor's file or the particular letter being mailed. *Id.* The Second Circuit concluded that the challenged letters, despite bearing the Defendant attorney's signature, violated Section 1692e(3) because, although literally "from" an attorney, they "were not `from' [him] in any meaningful sense of that word." *Id.* at 1320; accord, e.g., Avila, 84 F.3d at 229. The same result is obtained here.
15. Although Allen M. Rosenthal may technically be a law firm, it was not acting in the capacity of a law firm with respect to the said letters. The inclusion of "Law Offices" is therefore materially deceptive and misleading in that it communicates to the least

sophisticated consumer that the communication came from a law firm in a practical sense, when it did not.

16. If Allen M. Rosenthal desires to take advantage of the additional collection leverage provided by the use of a law firm's name in connection with purely debt-collection related activities, it is free to do so under the law of the Second Circuit so long as its each and every one of its standardized communications including letters and voice mail messages do not give the least sophisticated consumer the impression that the communications are from an attorney or law firm in the practical sense. See e.g. Clomon v Jackson, 988 F.2d 1314, 1320 (2d Cir. 1993). See e.g. Gonzalez v. Kay, 577 F.3d 600 (5th Cir. 2009). "Debt collectors acting solely as debt collectors must not send the message that a lawyer is involved, because this deceptively sends the message that the 'price of poker has gone up.'" See also. Sparkman v. Zwicker & Assocs., P.C., 374 F. Supp. 2d 293 (E.D.N.Y.2005). The court found that the collector's letter with text on the front and back regarding attorney involvement was confusing to the least sophisticated consumer and violated § 1692e.

See, e.g. Suquilanda v. Cohen & Slamowitz, LLP No. 1:10-cv-05868 (S.D.N.Y. SEP 08, 2011) " Absent any disclaimer and without an attorney conducting any meaningful review ,Using a "Law Office" Letterhead States a Claim for Relief under Section 1692e(3)".
17. On or about March 15, 2012, Defendant printed and mailed, or caused to be printed and mailed, a letter to Plaintiff in an effort to collect from Plaintiff an obligation, or alleged obligation, owed or due, or asserted to be owed or due an original creditor other than

Defendants and which Defendants acquired after such obligation or alleged obligation was charged-off or was in default. A true and correct copy of Defendant's communication is attached hereto.

18. Defendant, as a matter of pattern and practice, mail letters, or cause the mailing of letters, to debtors using language substantially similar or materially identical to that utilized by Defendant in mailing the above-cited letter to Plaintiff.
19. Defendant mails, or causes the mailing of, thousands of collection letters like the one sent Plaintiff without conducting any meaningful review of the accounts.
20. The letters the Defendant mails, or causes to be mailed, are produced by Defendant's concerted efforts and integrated or shared technologies including computer programs, mailing houses, and electronic databases.
21. The said letter is a standardized form letter.
22. Defendant violated 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e, 1692e(3), 1692e(10) for indicating that the communication came from a law firm in a practical sense and for failing to qualify that the debt had not been reviewed by an attorney.
23. In the said March 15, 2012 letter, which was for a debt at or about \$149.00, Defendant stated: Unless we hear from you on receipt of this letter as to your intentions in liquidating this indebtedness, we will have no other alternative but to proceed with our claim."
24. Upon information and belief, no such action has been taken.
25. Upon information and belief, the Defendant does not commence legal action for debts at or about \$149.00.

26. Said language was therefore a threat to take unintended legal action.
27. Defendant violated §1692e(5) of the FDCPA by threatening to take action against Plaintiff even though Defendant has not and does not intend to take such action.
28. In addition, the Defendant's said letter imposed upon the Plaintiff a false sense of urgency where upon information and belief, no collection efforts have been undertaken by the defendant despite overt threats to the contrary.
29. The said letter is in violation of the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e, 1692e(10) and 1692e(11) for making "false statements which constituted false or misleading representations creating a false sense of urgency."

AS AND FOR A FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION

***Violations of the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act brought by Plaintiff on behalf of herself
and the members of a class, as against the Defendant.***

30. Plaintiff re-states, re-alleges, and incorporates herein by reference, paragraphs 1-29 as if set forth fully in this cause of action.
31. This cause of action is brought on behalf of Plaintiff and the members of three classes.
32. Class A consists of all persons whom Defendant's records reflect resided in the State of New York and who received collection letters from Defendant's representatives within one year prior to the date of the within complaint up to the date of the filing of the complaint; (a) the collection letter(s) was sent to a consumer seeking payment of a consumer debt; and (c) that the collection letter(s) used an attorney letter head which represented that the letter was sent from a law firm in a practical sense but which failed

to qualify that the debt had not been reviewed by an attorney (d) the letter was sent concerning the seeking payment of an alleged debt and was not returned or undelivered by the post office; and (e) that the message contained violations of 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e, 1692e(3), 1692e(10).

33. Class B consists of all persons whom Defendant's records reflect resided in the State of New York and who received collection letters from Defendant's representatives within one year prior to the date of the within complaint up to the date of the filing of the complaint; (a) the collection letter was mailed to a consumer seeking payment of a consumer debt; and (b) the Defendant threatened to take any action that cannot legally be taken or that is not intended to be taken by Defendant in violation of 15 U.S.C. § 1692e(5).
34. Class C consists of all persons whom Defendant's records reflect resided in the State of New York and who received collection letters from Defendant's representatives within one year prior to the date of the within complaint up to the date of the filing of the complaint; (a) the collection letter was sent to a consumer seeking payment of a consumer debt; and (b) that the Defendant made false statements and created a false sense of urgency in violation of 15 U.S.C. § 1692e and 1692e(10).
35. Pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 23, a class action is appropriate and preferable in this case because:
 - (a) Based on the fact that form collection letters are at the heart of this litigation, the class is so numerous that joinder of all members is impracticable.
 - (b) There are questions of law and fact common to the class and these questions

predominate over any question(s) affecting only individual class members. The principal question presented by this claim is whether the Defendant violated the FDCPA.

- (c) The only individual issue involves the identification of the consumers who received such collection letters (*i.e.* the class members). This is purely a matter capable of ministerial determination from the records of the Defendant.
- (d) The claims of the Plaintiff are typical of those of the class members. All of the respective class claims are based on substantially similar facts and legal theories.
- (e) The Plaintiff will fairly and adequately represent the class members' interests. The Plaintiff has retained counsel experienced in bringing class actions and collection abuse claims. The Plaintiff's interests are consistent with those of the members of the class.

36. A class action is superior for the fair and efficient adjudication of the class members' claims. Congress specifically envisions class actions as a principal means of enforcing the FDCPA. 15 U.S.C. 1692(k). The members of the class are generally unsophisticated individuals, whose rights will not be vindicated in the absence of a class action. Prosecution of separate actions by individual members of the classes would create the risk of inconsistent or varying adjudications resulting in the establishment of inconsistent or varying standards for the parties and would not be in the interest of judicial economy.

37. If the facts are discovered to be appropriate, the Plaintiff will seek to certify a class pursuant to Rule 23(b)(3) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.
38. Collection attempts, such as those made by the Defendant are to be evaluated by the objective standard of the hypothetical "least sophisticated consumer."

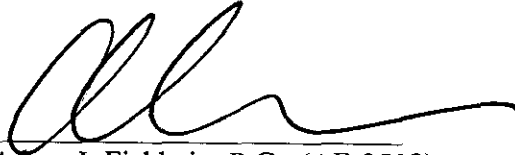
Violations of the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act

39. The Defendant's actions as set forth above in the within complaint violates the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act.
40. Because the Defendant violated of the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act, the Plaintiff and the members of the class are entitled to damages in accordance with the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff, respectfully requests that this Court enter judgment in Plaintiff's favor and against the Defendant and award damages as follows:

- (a) Statutory and actual damages provided under the FDCPA, 15 U.S.C. 1692(k);
And
- (b) Attorney fees, litigation expenses and costs incurred in bringing this action; and
- (c) Any other relief that this Court deems appropriate and just under the circumstances.

Dated: Cedarhurst, New York
June 19, 2012



Adam J. Fishbein, P.C. (AF-9508)

Attorney At Law

Attorney for the Plaintiff

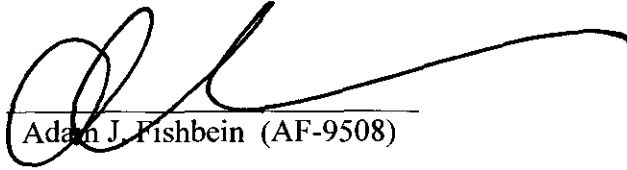
483 Chestnut Street

Cedarhurst, New York 11516

Telephone (516) 791-4400

Facsimile (516) 791-4411

Plaintiff requests trial by jury on all issues so triable.



Adam J. Fishbein (AF-9508)

ALLEN M. ROSENTHAL

ATTORNEY AT LAW

550 W. OLD COUNTRY ROAD, SUITE 201
HICKSVILLE, NEW YORK 11801

ALLEN M. ROSENTHAL

F. STEVEN TATE

(516) 938-1013

3/15/12

MS. MARY LISA MAONE
64 MADISON ST
FRANKLIN SQUARE, NY 11010

OUR FILE NO. 569536
JOSEPH ONORATO MD, PC DBA
ALL ISLAND DERMATOLOGY
BALANCE DUE-

DEAR MS. MAONE

Our previous request for payment was ignored. Unless we hear from you on receipt of this letter as to your intentions in liquidating this indebtedness, we will have no other alternative but to proceed with our claim.

This is a communication from a debt collector. We are attempting to collect a debt and any information obtained will be used for that purpose.

Please give this matter your immediate attention.

Very truly yours,

ALLEN M. ROSENTHAL